

DAKOTA COUNSEL

Watchdogs of the Prairie

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Protecting the Badlands: Support for the Maah Daah Hey National Monument

Dakota Resource Council (DRC) is proud to stand alongside Badlands Conservation Alliance, Maah Daah Hey Coalition (including the Three Affiliated Tribes, Standing Rock Sioux, Spirit Lake Nation), North Dakota Native Vote, North Dakota Wildlife Federation, and North Dakota Sierra Club in an effort to establish the Maah Daah Hey National Monument. This tribally led coalition is calling on the President to designate over 139,000 acres of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands in the Little Missouri River basin as a National Monument under the Antiquities Act. This initiative is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect the North Dakota Badlands' breathtaking landscapes, delicate ecosystems, and Indigenous cultural heritage.

If created, the Maah Daah Hey National Monument would:

- 🌿 Protect 11 non-motorized backcountry areas in western North Dakota.
- 🏡 Preserve Indigenous cultural practices and honor the region's rich history.
- 🦌 Safeguard critical wildlife habitats while maintaining the land's character.
- 👤 Foster sustainable tourism and economic growth.

As DRC and Fort Berthold POWER member Lisa Finley-DeVile powerfully stated:

"The North Dakota Badlands are an important landscape to Indigenous people throughout the region. Designating the Maah Daah Hey National Monument would ensure Indigenous people can return with pride to our ancestral lands and share our history with non-Indigenous people."

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Letter From the Chair



The Election and Its Meaning for DRC: A Vindication for Economic Populism Messaging and Organizing

**By Curt Stofferahn, DRC Chair, with
assistance from Garrett Zastoupil, DRC
Board Member**

By now, you've probably had your fill of armchair political analysts on cable news channels explaining why Kamala Harris lost the presidential election to the most unqualified candidate to ever run for the presidency. Most of their explanations are not based on exit polling data or survey data but rather reflect their own political prejudices. Being the data geek that I am—plus my undergraduate degree in political science—I defer to the opinions of analysts who ground their arguments in data. Anand Giridharadas is one such analyst I respect. On MSNBC's *Morning Joe* after the election, he remarked that Democrats have an inclusive platform, but it comes across as elitist and inaccessible. He argued that the Democratic Party must reconnect with ordinary Americans and address the concerns of those who feel left behind.

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**Badlands Area Resource Council
(BARC)**

**Fort Berthold Protectors of Water
& Earth Rights (POWER)**

**McKenzie County Energies &
Taxation Association
(MCETA)**

**Missouri Valley Resource Council
(MVRC)**

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1902 E. Divide Ave.
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(MAH DAAH HEY CONTINUED)

DRC also stands with farmers and ranchers who rely on these lands. Grazing and ranching will continue, despite misinformation suggesting otherwise. This initiative is about balance—protecting the Badlands’ unique beauty while fostering opportunities for ranchers, outdoor enthusiasts, and local economies.

Federal protections will include a planning process with local input, and DRC will ensure that grazing rights are protected if this monument becomes a reality. Together, we can secure a future where the Badlands thrive for generations to come.

For more information and to learn how you can get involved, visit www.protectmdh.com.

(LETTER FROM THE CHAIR CONTINUED)

In late August, historian Eric Foner wrote that Democrats were attempting to frame the election around competing definitions of freedom: “the freedom to make a better life for yourself and the people that you love” versus the freedom of corporations “to pollute your air” and banks to “take advantage of customers.” At the convention, UAW President Shawn Fain went even further, naming and blaming the villains obstructing a better life for working people: “Corporate greed turns blue-collar blood, sweat, and tears into Wall Street stock buybacks and CEO jackpots,” he argued, adding that Trump was a “scab” who would protect the interests of corporations and billionaires. That same month, the campaign announced commitments to tackle the housing shortage, crack down on price gouging, and raise the minimum wage.

Writers at *Jacobin* also base their analyses on data. In their article “If Harris Loses, This Is Why,” they argued that winning over key voters required placing blame for the current crisis where it belongs: on the economic elites working against the vast majority. Their surveys found strong support for this economic populist messaging and widespread disdain for billionaires and corporate elites, particularly among constituencies Harris struggled to reach—union members, voters without a college degree, and blue-collar workers, trailing Trump by 4, 7, and 19 points, respectively. Despite these findings, Harris pivoted away from anti-elite, economic messaging in the campaign’s final month. She de-emphasized popular policies under pressure from the business community, instead betting on appealing to moderate, college-educated voters. This risky strategy backfired. October surveys revealed Trump leading Harris with working-class voters by double-digit margins, with deficits among working-class white voters even larger.

The Center for Working-Class Politics, *Jacobin*, and YouGov tested messaging strategies and found that “strong populist” and progressive economic soundbites significantly outperformed others. Statements pledging to stand up to “billionaire crooks and the politicians in Washington who serve them” or emphasizing strengthening unions and taxing the rich resonated most. These messages garnered 9-13% more support than democracy-focused messaging, particularly among low-income, blue-collar, and non-college-educated respondents.

Donald Trump won a second term with the support of millions of working-class voters, especially those who felt the economy no longer worked for them. His gains were notable among white working-class voters and Hispanic working-class voters. These constituencies were motivated by concerns over inflation, wage growth, and affordable housing. Trump’s rhetoric scapegoated immigrants and framed them as a cause of economic troubles, resonating with some voters.

Despite his rhetoric, Trump’s policies are poised to benefit the billionaire class. *The Guardian* reported on December 6, 2024, that Trump’s incoming administration will be the wealthiest in U.S. history, with key positions filled by billionaires. These appointees are likely to slash public services critical to the poor and vulnerable. Economists and union representatives warn that Trump’s policies may worsen the challenges facing blue-collar workers, from undermining workers’ rights to enacting tariffs that could harm industries dependent on imports.

In rural America, farming-dependent counties overwhelmingly backed Trump, with support averaging 78% and increasing by nearly two points from 2020. Farmers may face significant financial challenges under Trump’s proposed tariffs, which could raise costs for equipment and inputs while reducing demand for agricultural exports. Estimates suggest these tariffs could cost U.S. farmers billions in lost revenue.

Garrett Zastoupil, Scott Skokos, and I are collaborating on a book chapter titled *Rebuilding a Rural Left*. In it, we review DRC’s organizing strategies against out-of-state corporations exploiting North Dakota’s lax environmental and labor regulations. Anti-corporate messaging has yielded some of our biggest wins. Even when campaigns don’t result in outright victories, they demonstrate the power of mobilization, collective action, and community empowerment. Framing the

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(LETTER FROM THE CHAIR CONTINUED)

central challenge as opposition to external capitalists exploiting North Dakota's resources offers a path to reignite left-wing populism in our organizing.

Scholars distinguish between right-wing and left-wing populism, both centering conflict between "the people" and "the elite." Left-wing populism pits "the people" against corporate elites, while right-wing populism scapegoats minorities, immigrants, and other marginalized groups. Successful rural organizing often integrates multi-issue efforts, spanning environmental, economic, and social justice concerns. These campaigns challenge concentrated corporate power while emphasizing leadership development and cross-generational coalitions.

To sharpen our focus, DRC must:

1. **Reconfigure North Dakota's power map** to expose industry collusion with elected officials.
2. **Refine our communication strategy** with a two-pronged approach: highlight how external capitalists exploit North Dakotans while affirming our commitment to preserving the state's land, resources, and opportunities for future generations.

Through organizing rooted in anti-corporate, left-wing populist principles, we can build a powerful, inclusive movement for North Dakota's future.

Agriculture

Abercrombie Riverview Dairy Permit Comes into Question

New information from the Abercrombie Citizens for Responsible Growth suggests that the permit issued for the Riverview Dairy Project by Abercrombie Township may be invalid. An independent survey revealed that the facility is located less than one mile from Daryl Johnson's residence, potentially violating state law. The law mandates that any facility housing more than 5,000 head of livestock must be at least a mile away from any residence, commercial property, or recreational zone.

Adding to the controversy, public records and meeting minutes related to the Riverview Dairy Project have been scarce. In contrast, DRC was able

to obtain meeting minutes and the permit for the Abercrombie Solar Project, which was approved during the same timeframe, with ease.

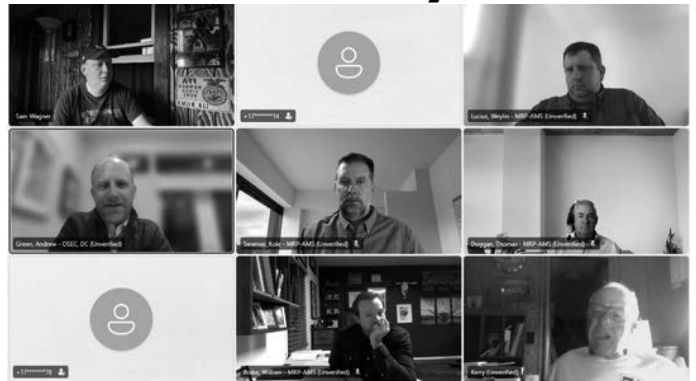
If the permit is deemed invalid, Riverview Dairy may have to restart the permitting process and potentially find a new site if it cannot meet the setback requirements. DRC will keep you updated as the situation unfolds.

Richland County Farm Bureau Survey Shows Majority Opposition to Dairy Project

A recent survey conducted by the Richland County Farm Bureau revealed that the majority of voting members oppose the Riverview Dairy Project. The final results showed 55 members against the project, 48 in favor, and 3 indifferent. Several members of the county chapter abstained from voting.

State Farm Bureau officials dismissed the survey results, claiming it does not represent a true majority. Nevertheless, the outcome highlights significant local opposition to the project.

DRC and WORC Cattle Committee Meet with GIPSA Head Andy Green



DRC and the Independent Beef Association of North Dakota (IBAND) hosted a final meeting with Andy Green, head of the USDA's Grain Inspectors, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA), before his term ends in January. Green highlighted the progress made during the Biden Administration, including:

(ANDY GREEN MEETING CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

(ANDY GREEN MEETING CONTINUED)

- Eliminating the tournament system for poultry.
- Advancing country-of-origin labeling.
- Reforming the Packers and Stockyards Act to clearly define unfair practices and prevent retaliation from packers.

Green assured attendees that although his term is ending, his experienced staff will continue to support the work of organizations like DRC for years to come.

DRC Hosts Book Tour with Sonja Eayrs and Legislative Conference on CAFOs



On November 16, DRC invited Minnesota author and lawyer Sonja Eayrs to hold a legislative conference at Luna Coffee in Fargo. Legislators and members discussed the need for improved setback laws, local control, and fair taxation of corporate agriculture facilities to address infrastructure damage caused by CAFOs.

Following the conference, Eayrs held a book signing at Ferguson Books in Fargo and another at Silver Dawn Bookstore in Grand Forks. Her book, *Dodge County Inc.: Big Ag and the Undoing of Rural America*, chronicles her family's legal battle against Dodge County, Minnesota, to stop a corporate factory farm from being built next to their intergenerational family farm. During her presentation, Eayrs detailed the inhumane treatment of animals, the devastating health impacts on local residents, and the emergence of cancer clusters following the facility's construction.

DRC thanks Sonja Eayrs for her time and powerful storytelling during her visit to North Dakota.

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Ag Model Zoning Task Force Prepares for Legislative Session

The Agricultural Model Zoning Task Force convened for its final meeting ahead of the upcoming legislative session. Discussions centered on refining zoning guidelines to better protect local communities and ensure fair treatment of small farmers. Updates on the task force's recommendations will be shared in the coming months.

CO-OP NEWS

Progress on the Basin Campaign: Bringing Cooperative Values Back to Basin Electric

We're thrilled to share updates on our campaign to help Basin Electric Cooperative rediscover the cooperative values that have supported North Dakota communities for generations. This campaign focuses on ensuring Basin operates with transparency, adheres to the 7 cooperative principles, and prioritizes its members—especially those in rural cooperatives. With Basin serving 14 out of 16 cooperatives in North Dakota, its decisions carry significant weight across the state.

Rural communities are often overlooked in discussions about energy and governance. Cooperatives, however, offer a unique opportunity for residents to directly influence the communities where they live and work. Whether by running for a board seat or actively participating in decision-making, members can help guide their co-op to better reflect the values of fairness, transparency, and shared success.

The recent Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) case underscored areas where Basin could better align with cooperative principles, emphasizing the critical role of member involvement. This moment serves as a powerful reminder: the voices and actions of cooperative members matter now more than ever.

To amplify this message, we're launching new tools to keep members informed and engaged. A campaign website is in development, offering resources to empower member involvement. We're also producing video content and collecting stories from cooperative members to highlight the real-life impacts of cooperative decisions on rural communities.

Your story is a vital part of this effort. Whether your experience with your cooperative has been positive, challenging, or somewhere in between, we want to hear from you. By sharing your perspective, you can help us advocate for stronger, more connected cooperatives that truly serve rural communities.

Reach out to Ishauna at ishauna@drcinfo.com to share your story and be part of this movement. Together, we can ensure our cooperatives remain true to their mission of serving and uplifting rural North Dakota.

CO2 PIPELINE

Carbon Pipeline: Pressuring for Safety and Accountability

Recent developments in South Dakota have raised uncertainty about Summit Carbon Solutions' ability to proceed in the state. Summit's loss of common carrier status, coupled with South Dakota voters rejecting pro-CO₂ policies, could spell the end of the entire project. While North Dakota's Public Service Commission (PSC) recently ruled in favor of Summit, DRC is shifting its focus to the Oil and Gas Division.

A critical safety concern has emerged: Summit plans to use 13 Chrome steel for CO₂ injection, despite evidence suggesting it is inadequate for this purpose. Experts recommend 25 Chrome steel, which is believed to be safer but is more expensive and harder to procure. DRC is working to pressure the Oil and Gas Division to mandate the use of 25 Chrome steel for current and future CO₂ projects to ensure safety and reliability.

As the legislative session approaches, DRC is gearing up for action. Zach Cassidy will testify on policies related to the pipeline and is actively recruiting volunteers to testify or submit written

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(CARBON PIPELINE CONTINUED)

statements for or against relevant legislation at the state level.

Additionally, DRC is monitoring existing CO₂ injection wells in North Dakota, including those at Dakota Gasification, Blue Flint, and Red Tail Energy, to ensure these projects meet the highest safety and environmental standards.

CLEAN ENERGY

Ongoing Work to Re-establish a Red River Valley Affiliate

Since July, establishing a regional affiliate to focus on issues in the Fargo Metro and the broader Red River Valley has been a priority. The focus of this work has been to unite interest groups at the intersection of parks, urbanism, ecology, and the environment. Already, a coalition to expand and fully connect the metro's bicycle transportation network has begun to emerge.

Several events for this emerging group have already occurred. Our partners at Strong Towns Fargo organized a public presentation by the Metro Council of Governments staff about their ongoing work to expand and enhance the area's bicycle system. DRC will co-host a public meeting regarding the region's outdoor infrastructure with Midwest Outdoors on December 18th and has begun planning a presentation on the Maah Daah Hey National Monument project. A larger public meeting is proposed for late spring, which will hopefully include representatives from Grand Forks.

With two organizers in the Metro, DRC is already well integrated into local politics. In addition to existing members and former CLEAN members, several potential members have already been identified. By summer, we should have a functioning proto-affiliate in the Red River Valley.

Clean Energy Update

The 200 MW 'Harmony' solar array proposed near Mapleton, ND, had its permit extended by the Public Service Commission. Along with the 'Flickertail' array planned near Abercrombie, this gives North Dakota 500 MW of solar generating capacity and 600 MWh of battery storage in development. Both facilities are expected to begin construction in the fall of 2025.

Dakota Resource Council (DRC) is excited to announce the outcomes of our recent collaboration on the Rural Electric Co-Op Scorecard Initiative (RECSI). This initiative assessed electric cooperatives across North Dakota, Illinois, and Wisconsin, in partnership with North Dakota Native Vote, Prairie Rivers Network (Illinois), Citizens Utility Board (Illinois), and Green Neighbor Challenge (Wisconsin). The goal was to pinpoint areas where co-ops can enhance their operations, particularly in embracing clean energy solutions and increasing member engagement.

The city of Fargo's grant application to convert the city's street lighting to LED was recently rejected. The plan, a focus of the city's sustainability committee since its creation in 2020, would have drastically reduced the energy demands of the street lighting system while also allowing the city to more actively combat its light pollution problem.

The policy group of the Energy Builders table has met and produced recommended legislation for the 2025 legislative session. We will focus on a resiliency package targeted at farmers, rural grocery stores, greenhouses, and businesses. Our proposal involves reducing the threshold for the existing sales tax exemption from 100 kW to 25 kW. This will be combined with a proposed \$100-per-kWh battery subsidy. Combined, these policies could reduce the price of a solar + storage system by nearly 10% from current prices.

AFFILIATE NEWS

The Missouri Valley Resource Council (MVRC), DRC's Bismarck affiliate, is making a comeback. After two meetings in November, members identified priorities to address key issues in the Bismarck/Mandan area:

- Alternative Fuel and Electric School Buses: A member is contacting the local school district to explore cleaner fuel options.
- Northern Bismarck Riverfront Development: Members are raising concerns about environmental impacts of proposed projects, advocating for a balanced approach.
- Restoring Mandan Bike Trails: The group plans to push for the restoration of bike trails disrupted by BNSF bridge construction.
- Summit Carbon Pipeline Campaign: Members are working with Zach Cassidy to increase awareness and community engagement.

MVRC is energized to tackle these challenges and bring positive change. To get involved, contact zach@drcinfo.com!

Dakota Resource Council
1902 E. Divide Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58501
www.drcinfo.org



I want to join Dakota Resource Council and affect positive change in North Dakota!

Please make your tax-deductible payment to DRC and mail to
1720 Burnt Boat Dr,
Ste 104, Bismarck, ND
58503, OR join at
drcinfo.org/join

1. Choose membership level

- ☐ \$1000* Watchdog of the Prairie
- ☐ \$500 Sustaining
- ☐ \$250 Supporting
- ☐ \$100 Century Club
- ☐ \$55 Household
- ☐ \$35 Individual
- ☐ \$15 Student/Senior

2. I ALSO want to join my local affiliate, please choose one at \$10.00

- ☐ Badlands Area Resource Council
- ☐ Fort Berthold Protectors of Water & Earth Rights
- ☐ McKenzie County Energy & Taxation Association
- ☐ Missouri Valley Resource Council

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____